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STATE FOR EUR/ERA AND EUR/AGS - SAINT-ANDRE

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIA ON THE MAY 14-15 EU FOREIGN MINISTERS
MEETING (GAERC)

REF: STATE 60948

Classified By: Economic-Political Counselor Gregory E. Phillips. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) EconPolCouns delivered reftel points on May 10 to Andreas Riecken, the Austrian MFA's European Correspondent. Riecken made the following substantive comments.

¶2. (SBU) Riecken noted that the May GAERC will include meetings of Defense and Development Cooperation Ministers. Defense Minister Norbert Darabos will attend defense meetings for Austria, and MFA State Secretary Hans Winkler will participate in meetings of Development ministers.

¶3. (C) Western Balkans: There are no plans to discuss Bosnia, Riecken said, because there is nothing new to report. Foreign Ministers will discuss the election of the new Serbian parliamentary president, as well as progress on Kosovo status issues. There will be council conclusions on the creation of a Regional Cooperation Council to take on the work of the Stability Pact.

¶4. (C) Uzbekistan: The EU conducted a human rights dialogue with Uzbekistan on May 9. The May 10 COREPER discussed the issue of the extension of the EU's 2006 common position on Uzbekistan. There is a common understanding in the EU that there has not been enough progress on human rights to justify a lift of restrictive measures on Uzbekistan. The debate is whether to recognize what progress there has been by improving contacts somewhat.

¶5. (C) Middle East: The German Presidency proposed inviting representatives of the Arab League and some Arab League member governments to participate in discussions during the GAERC. This would come in response to an Arab League decision at Riyadh. Riecken said this would involve the Palestinian, Saudi and Jordanian foreign ministers.

¶6. (C) Africa: There will be short discussions on Sudan and Somalia, Riecken said. In addition, there are council conclusions on Somalia. The Democratic Republic of the Congo will be the subject of discussion among defense and foreign ministers. This will focus specifically on the operational issue of security assistance and security sector reform.

¶7. (C) Russia-EU Summit: Ministers will discuss preparations for the summit, Riecken said. There were three issues that certain EU member states had raised. Estonia wanted to discuss the ramifications of the "bronze soldier" dispute; Latvia wanted to talk about Russia's blockage of oil shipments since July 2006; and Poland wanted to discuss Russian restrictions on Polish meat imports. Riecken noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Vienna on a bilateral visit on May 23.

18. (C) European Defense Agency: This will be a "routine" discussion among defense ministers, Riecken said.

19. (C) Other topics: Riecken identified the following topics in addition to those we raised:

-- Iraq: There will be some discussion, as well as council conclusions, on the Sharm el-Sheikh meetings, with an expression of hope that the meetings will lead to further progress.

-- ESDP Missions: There will be operational discussions of ESDP police missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan. In this context, Riecken said that Austria will contribute significant numbers to Kosovo, and a limited number ("one or two") to Afghanistan.

-- WTO: In line with a continuing French request, WTO will be on the agenda, Riecken noted. He added that there will be no decisions.

-- Black Sea Cooperation: Ideas for improving cooperation among Black Sea littoral countries will be the topic of discussion, Riecken said. He noted that some eastern European countries fear that any commitment of funds for the Black Sea region will come out of funds for eastern Europe.
Kilner